



Hell and High Water: The Battle to Save the Daily New Orleans Times-Picayune

Rebecca Theim

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The tale of the fierce grassroots battle to save New Orleans' beloved 175-year-old, Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper, and the changes that continue to roil it and other Advance Publications properties from Portland to Mobile.

Near midnight on May 23, 2012, the *New York Times* broke the story that Advance Publications, the New York-based owner of about three dozen US newspapers, would use its 175-year-old *New Orleans Times-Picayune* as the testing ground for a risky experiment. The *Picayune*--which won fierce local devotion, international acclaim, and two Pulitzer Prizes for its heroic coverage of the aftermath of 2005's Hurricane Katrina--would become a three-day-per-week publication and shift its focus to its much derided nola.com Web site, leaving New Orleans as the largest US city without a daily newspaper. The profitable newspaper, with the country's highest readership penetration in a city its size, then proceeded to purge its veteran newsroom, antagonize much of the city and state, attract negative national and international attention, and jeopardize its vaunted reputation--all in an effort to create a new blueprint for the profitable operation of American newspapers in today's increasingly digital world.

The *Times-Picayune* wasn't the first or last Advance Publications newspaper to undergo this transformation. The company began implementing this plan at many of its newspapers in 2009 despite waves of protest. However, the *Times-Picayune* was its foremost guinea pig. In a desperate attempt to recapture public favor, Advance implemented daily newsstand-only editions of the *Times-Picayune* to supplement its scant coverage. Author Rebecca Theim's deft treatment of the impact on employees and region; the enigmatic owners of Advance Publications; and Advance Publication's ambitious business model is a revelatory exposé of the swiftly changing face of journalism.



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